

18-135

# Medicaid patients in S.C. left waiting

## Officials ask Sanford to take action on complaints concerning transportation

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Media General Columbia Bureau

COLUMBIA — Alzheimer's patients being left alone on the sidewalk, 36-hour bus rides for one hospital visit, not being picked up for two separate doctor's appointments — is this how our elderly friends and family should be treated?

That's the question Lt. Gov. André Bauer is asking, along with hundreds of others from across the state. He's asking Gov. Mark Sanford to take action and appoint a new director for the state's Department of Health and Human Services.

Bauer and House Speaker Bobby Harrell have asked Sanford to put someone in charge

to help reduce the number of complaints they've been receiving about how Medicaid patients are taken to and from their doctor appointments and hospital visits.

Rep. Dennis Moss, R-Gaffney, among others, is tracing these problems back to May this year when the department began using broker companies from other states to provide these services. Before that, rides had been scheduled through local agencies.

On Wednesday, Sen. Harvey Peeler, R-Gaffney, called a public hearing for S.C. Department of Health and Human Services officials and the executives from the companies to express their concerns to the Senate Medical Affairs

Committee.

The room was packed, but when Peeler asked for anyone other than the companies' CEOs to show support for the state's new system, no one expressed favor for it.

Some of the complaints include long waits on the telephone to schedule transportation appointments, being taken to the wrong doctor's office and not being picked up at all, instead being left to wait in the heat.

The two companies being used are LogistiCare, based in Atlanta, and Medical Transportation Management out of Missouri.

See MEDICAID, 6A

The Morning  
News  
Florence, SC  
Circ. 33086  
From Page:  
1  
7/19/2007  
61050



Bauer



Sanford

## MEDICAID

Continued From 1A

While officials for both companies defend their work and company standards, many others said they aren't happy with the changes in the state system.

Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority Executive Director Janice Baroody said her Florence-based agency didn't see problems of this nature before the new brokers were involved.

"I do not believe South Carolina is benefiting from the system," she said. "The brokers are benefiting ... (and) the delivery of services are suffering."

Medical Transportation Management CEO Alaina Macia acknowledged the complaints and said she and her company are working steadily to improve.

"In the short time frame from May to June, complaints we've received about transportation went from 499 in May to 305 in June, while we provided 47,000 trips," she said.

LogistiCare CEO John Shermeyen said he recognizes a difference in the new and old systems, but he said the change is good.

"Our model is a little bit different than the model that you had before," he said, "and it really focuses on accountability and quality and access."

William Wells, the deputy director for finance and administration for the state Department of Health and Human Services, said the new system is more cost-effective.

"There's potential savings there of about, over \$50 million over that five-year period," Wells said.

But that hasn't convinced everyone the new system is worth keeping.

"It's wrong for any South Carolinian," Steve Lanford of South Carolina's Emergency Medical Services Association said. "I don't care what your level of income is, I don't care what your social status is, to leave somebody out in the hot sun waiting on a ride and they don't show up because we've got a new system is wrong."